CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND SIXTY-NINTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 24 June 1997, at 10 a.m.

President : Mrs. Krasnohorská (Slovakia)

GE.97-62044 (E)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 769th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Before giving the floor to the first speaker on the list, I should like to make some opening remarks.

It is a great honour and responsibility for me to assume the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament on behalf of the Slovak Republic. I should like to emphasize that no effort will be spared on my part in discharging my duties as the President of this august body.

First of all, I wish to express my deep gratitude to my predecessors, Ambassador Diallo of Senegal, Ambassador Berdennikov of the Russian Federation, Mr. Grecu from Romania and Ambassador Sun of the Republic of Korea, for all the efforts they made to bring about the agenda and the programme of work for this year's session. I am also very grateful to Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, his deputy, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, and all their staff, and I am convinced they will be of great assistance in performing my functions as the CD's President.

The Conference on Disarmament, as the only multilateral forum for concrete negotiations on arms control and disarmament, has played an important role in the modern history of mankind. It has achieved many successes in negotiating and finalizing important disarmament treaties and conventions. Let me mention at least the recent ones - the Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty and the Convention on Chemical Weapons. Slovakia therefore attaches the utmost importance to the Conference on Disarmament with its unique functions, and follows its activities with great attention and interest. This claim was recently confirmed by the visit of the Slovak Minister for Foreign Affairs, who spoke to the plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament last week. Among other assertions, she said: "The history of the last 50 years has unequivocally proved that the United Nations Organization has been an irreplaceable institution contributing to the solution" of the questions of international security, stability, peace, arms control and disarmament. "The Conference on Disarmament and its predecessors that belong to the large United Nations family has gained a great reputation by its expertise, perseverance and mainly by its achievements". I wish to stress that the words by my Minister emphasizing the importance of the Conference on Disarmament recall not only the satisfaction, but also the obligation, we feel towards the Conference on Disarmament in the narrow sense, and the international community in the broad sense.

It is understandable that after important achievements by international bodies, including the CD, a crossroads comes that represents a major challenge. This challenge requires that all participants analyse the past and look to the future with a certain distance and political wisdom. But if I can again use the words of my Minister, the Conference on Disarmament nowadays "does not seem to be making full use of the opportunities offered to it". The progress seems to be too slow and painstaking, the positions of some delegations rather inflexible. I believe that mutual confidence, pragmatism and concentration on the issues that join us, rather than those that separate

(The President)

us, is the only way to proceed. It is highly important to preserve the momentum created by international changes and make full use of the present window of opportunity. The Conference on Disarmament has a great role in this process. Its eventual inability to adapt to the new tasks would have a detrimental effect on its relevance and position in the international mechanism for arms control and disarmament. The role of the Conference must be not only preserved but reinforced, too. I believe that creating linkages between substantive elements of the CD's work will not be conducive to progress. On the other hand, there is a realistic threat that the linkages will be counter-productive and endanger progress even on those elements where progress is possible. The CD certainly has to address the most pressing issues. Today these issues are the question of nuclear weapons on the one hand and conventional weapons on the other. The CD should no longer delay discussion on what further role, if any, it could play in nuclear disarmament, and identify the specific issues it could embark upon. Meanwhile, it should concentrate on issues that seem to be the least controversial and where progress seems to be within reach. I pledge to all of you that I will spare no effort in contributing to the achievement of this goal. In the post of President, I will do my utmost to ensure the success of the work of the Conference on Disarmament. I rely on your assistance in dealing with the important tasks which lie ahead. We must try to achieve progress and start working before the end of the second part of the CD's 1997 session.

Before concluding, I should like to touch upon another important issue, namely, the expansion of the CD. My country has recent memories of being an observer and therefore fully understands the applicant States. The CD should remain open to all candidates. With this in mind I intend to hold consultations on the possibility of nominating a special coordinator for CD expansion with a broad mandate to explore possible modalities and ways forward.

(continued in French)

On my list of speakers today I have the representative of the United States of America, Ms. Crittenberger, to whom I now give the floor.

Ms. CRITTENBERGER (United States of America): Madam President, as you enter upon your public duties as President of the Conference on Disarmament, it is both an honour and a pleasure to welcome you, as well as congratulate ourselves that the progression of the alphabet has put you in the Chair at this important juncture. The United States regrets that in spite of the energetic efforts by both of your two immediate predecessors, Ambassador Berdennikov of the Russian Federation and Ambassador Diallo of Senegal - as well as the energetic efforts of their two predecessors - the Conference remains just as deadlocked as it was on 21 January, our first plenary this year. From that time forward you were the fifth person to have assumed these burdens. The delegation of the United States pledges our full cooperation as you, in turn, seek to launch the Conference's substantive work on the vital issues it is charged to examine.

The United States takes very seriously our obligation under article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty "to pursue negotiations in good faith on

effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control". In the particular context of the commencement of the strengthened review process agreed at the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of Parties to the NPT, the United States, along with the delegations of China, France, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, expressed our determination to continue to implement fully all the provisions of the Treaty, including those of article VI.

Bearing this in mind, along with other important factors, I would like to congratulate Ambassador Lafer and his distinguished colleagues from Brazil in connection with President Cardoso's announcement on 20 June that he was submitting the NPT to the Congress for ratification. The United States welcomes this step, since Brazil's adherence to the NPT will make an important contribution to ongoing efforts to strengthen the international regime for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

The NPT and its article VI are likewise relevant here in the Conference on Disarmament. All of us are affected by steps undertaken in regard to the implementation of these commitments. In this context, the United States supported adoption last December of General Assembly resolution 51/45 G, which invites the nuclear-weapon States and others "to keep States Members of the United Nations duly informed of the progress and efforts made". For this reason, Ambassador Berdennikov and I requested that the joint statements issued by President Clinton and President Yeltsin in Helsinki be circulated as a formal document of the Conference. These are contained in document CD/1460. In part, our two Presidents agreed that after START II enters into force, the United States and Russia will immediately begin negotiations on a START III agreement. That agreement, in turn, will involve total reductions of 80 per cent from peak levels during the cold war. In addition, the United States and Russia will seek to incorporate "measures relating to the transparency of strategic nuclear warhead inventories and the destruction of strategic nuclear warheads ...". This will be the first time in the history of strategic arms control and disarmament that our two countries will seek to formulate measures that will eliminate warheads, not just delivery vehicles.

In regard to nuclear arms, bilateral negotiations work. They have succeeded in the past, and they remain intensely needed now. The Conference on Disarmament is not the appropriate forum to pursue agreements to reduce nuclear arsenals - at least not at this stage. However, we remain convinced that the Conference on Disarmament has substantial contributions to make in regard to the wider or more general process of nuclear disarmament, those broad undertakings which have practical implications for all or nearly all the world's nations. Viewed from this perspective, the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty falls squarely within the nuclear disarmament process. We believe that in practice, as its preamble states, the CTBT will constrain the development and qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons, and that it will end the development of advanced new types.

On a multilateral level, the next logical step is for the CD to negotiate a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and

effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other explosive devices, on the basis of the report of the Special Coordinator dated 24 March 1995 and contained in document CD/1299, and the mandate contained therein. We strongly agree with an eloquent remark by Italian Ambassador Balboni Acqua during his statement last Thursday: "It is inconceivable to permit fissile materials to be manufactured while nuclear tests are being banned and existing fissile material is being destroyed."

When he spoke here on 15 May, United States Arms Controls and Disarmament Agency Director John Holum stressed the CD's successful history of using practical, problem-solving, step-by-step methods to negotiate and conclude treaties on major disarmament issues. He noted that we need to adopt this practical approach once again in order to negotiate a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

Nuclear-weapon States have ceased to produce fissile material, but this change in policy occurred only recently. A fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) would codify this in a legally binding, verifiable, and global agreement. The nuclear-weapon States would then be asked to accept a permanent legal constraint embodying what is now only a voluntary, and reversible, policy. This, in practice, would place an upper limit on the amount of fissile material than can ever be used for nuclear weapons. After nuclear-weapon States have disposed of highly enriched uranium or plutonium removed from existing nuclear weapons, they could not compensate for that by adding to their stockpiles of fissile material.

Reprocessing and enrichment facilities produce new fissile material, so the FMCT will put all those facilities under safeguards. That will ensure they are used solely to produce fissile material for peaceful purposes - research, medical isotopes, reactor fuel, and other non-explosive uses. In practice, fissile material is the modern chokepoint in creating or enlarging nuclear stockpiles. Even a State that knows how to make nuclear weapons cannot manufacture them unless it has adequate fissile material on hand.

All those who consider nuclear disarmament a priority for the Conference on Disarmament should look upon the negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty as an important and positive step. It is difficult to imagine how nuclear arms reductions can proceed much further unless there is a dependable limit on nuclear materials and confidence that the international community will be able to detect clandestine production.

As we are meeting this very morning, colleagues of mine and, I believe, members of various other delegations, will have arrived in Brussels to begin attending a special conference to discuss the need for a comprehensive global ban on anti-personnel landmines (APL). Representatives of the United States are attending the Brussels conference as observers because we continue to believe that the Ottawa Process can provide useful political momentum to the wider overal effort to ban APL. On the other hand, the United States remains convinced that the CD offers the most practical and effective forum for negotiating a comprehensive global ban on APL. Many politically and militarily important nations are not full participants in the Ottawa Process,

and a number of them have announced that they will not be bound by any draft treaty negotiated without their full and active participation. To rid the world's arsenals of landmines, we need to negotiate here in the Conference on Disarmament.

To be quite candid, we have been discouraged at the long list of procedural objections that have persistently impeded efforts in this Conference to initiate appropriate negotiations on anti-personnel landmines. We understand that a significant number of member States have security concerns which they believe must be addressed, and we are confident that CD members will take account of those concerns during negotiations in this body. In order to facilitate prompt agreement to start CD negotiations on anti-personnel landmines, the United States strongly supports Australia's proposal for the appointment of a special coordinator to conduct consultations and present an early report. This is the proposal contained in document CD/1465.

As members are well aware, this draft decision is very similar to a previous proposal of Australia's, contained in document CD/1458, that was discussed in an informal meeting on 22 May and significantly edited as a result. The current proposal is thus at least the grandson of Australia's original wording, but a more candid genealogy would at least reach back to the text proposed by Finland, Chile and Poland on 27 March and contained in document CD/1452. By that account, it is almost two months since CD members began actively discussing the appointment of a special coordinator on APL. Even so, historical completeness would lead us to recall brief comments by Ambassador Munir Akram, the distinguished representative of Pakistan, during his plenary statement on 30 January (PV.753). In those remarks, Ambassador Akram advocated that the international community "explore, in the CD, the further measures we can take to move towards the ultimate goal of prohibiting anti-personnel landmines without jeopardizing the security of States. We propose that a special coordinator be appointed to conduct such an exploration and evolve appropriate terms of reference for negotiations in the CD on anti-personnel landmines."

The United States is pleased to remind the Conference of this 30 January proposal of the distinguished Ambassador of Pakistan, and in substance we support it. As a practical matter, Australia tabled the wording of the draft decision that is now before the Conference, and we see no reason for further delay. The United States believes that Australia's proposal is ripe for action, and we urge that the Conference approve it promptly and in that context, I request that today you ask delegations to take the decision on the proposal contained in document CD/1465.

Excessive and destabilizing accumulations of conventional arms pose a grave threat to international peace and security, and with this in mind the United States strongly believes that the CD should re-establish its former Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency in Armaments. The topic is at least as relevant now as in 1992, when the CD added transparency in armaments to its formal agenda, or in 1993, when the CD first established an Ad Hoc Committee to address it. Unfortunately, however, the AHC met last in 1994, even though world attention has continued to increase in the three succeeding years. Over

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130 different nations have submitted data on arms transfers since the United Nations Register was established, and the 1997 Group of Governmental Experts on the Register is currently conducting the second of its three sessions. Last year, the United Nations Disarmament Commission issued a consensus report on arms transfers and regional organizations are devoting substantially greater attention to transparency in armaments. For example, the Organization of American States has decided to establish a western hemisphere register of APL holdings.

In this context of innovation and ferment, the CD should continue to explore how the nations of the world can increase international confidence by making their military preparations more open and transparent. With that in mind, the CD should re-establish its Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency in Armaments, a step that in the view of my delegation is long overdue.

The United States can understand the strong interest of observer countries that have applied for admission as full members of the Conference. We believe that the CD should examine this question with the utmost seriousness, and we continue to believe that there is a consensus for the CD to appoint a special coordinator for that purpose. The United States supports that idea. We would likewise support a decision by the President of the Conference to appoint a Friend of the Chair instead, if there continues to be significant difficulty in identifying an appropriate person who would agree to serve as special coordinator. In terms of the underlying issues, however, we believe the question of further expansion of the Conference is closely linked with its improved and effective functioning. The CD has not yet been able to carry out significant substantive work this year, and it is difficult to envision an overall outcome whereby the CD remains deadlocked on all work on the table, yet proceeds to decide to add chairs around it.

We are nearing the end of the second part of our 1997 session, and perhaps it is not too soon to begin thinking about what kind of report we shall submit to this year's session of the General Assembly. Shall we simply say that we engaged in endless debate, encompassing plenary meetings, informal plenary meetings, open-ended consultations, and meetings of regional and political groups and other impromptu gatherings too numerous to mention? Shall we then, at the end of this long and depressing account, merely add that we were unable to agree to do anything on any of the topics before us?

For our part, we believe it should not be so, that we have it in our power to prevent the ridicule and scorn which such a report would undoubtedly arouse among our colleagues in the First Committee and delegates in New York. We still have both the means and the time to take decisions that would enable the Conference to prepare a report more worthy of our national goals and the collective aspirations of the international community.

Yes, sessions of the Conference on Disarmament certainly do enable us to put forward national views and debate the issues. I am portraying the views of my own country today, and I wholeheartedly support and defend the right of the representatives of other nations to do likewise. But, in the ultimate analysis, we are not here to debate, we are here to negotiate. The world community encompasses many bodies that debate issues related to arms control

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and disarmament, but this is the only global body that can negotiate on them. If we neglect our mandate to negotiate on multilateral issues that are ripe for action, if we merely continue to debate, debate and debate, the international community may well tire of us, this institution and this place.

I hope not, for the United States continues to believe that the Conference on Disarmament can make an important and meaningful contribution that will enhance international peace and security. But getting to that point will require a collective decision by members of this body that the limits of rhetoric and procedural manoeuvre have already been explored, and that now it is time for us to act on issues ripe for real negotiations here. This is what we seek, and what we hope will actually happen.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of the United States of America for her statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I have no more speakers on my list for today. Would any other delegations like to take the floor at this stage?

[continued in English]

Delegations have heard the request by the distinguished representative of the United States to adopt a decision promptly on the appointment of a special coordinator on anti-personnel mines. Are all delegations ready to adopt the decision as contained in document CD/1465 at this stage?

[continued in French]

I give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka, Ambassador Goonetilleke.

Mr. GOONETILLEKE (Sri Lanka): Madam President, I should begin by congratulating you on assuming your duties as President of the Conference. I should also like to congratulate the past President, the Ambassador of Senegal, for conducting the responsibilities in a very efficient manner. If you recall, when we met at the plenary last Thursday, the President informed this Conference that the next plenary would be held on Thursday next, that is, two days from now and, in keeping with this particular decision, I believe many delegations would have informed respective capitals with regard to the position on this particular decision. Certainly, my delegation communicated the information to our capital with the hope of receiving instructions in time for the next plenary meeting. In view of the above, I wonder whether it is possible for us to reach a decision on this matter, as decided by the Conference earlier, at our next plenary meeting to be held on Thursday. This is merely a request in keeping with the decision which we adopted at the last plenary meeting.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Sri Lanka for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

[continued in English]

(The President)

Drawing conclusions from the short discussion, I have to state that there are still delegations that need more time to obtain instructions from their capitals, and the Conference on Disarmament is therefore not ready to adopt the decision on the appointment of the special coordinator on anti-personnel landmines at this stage. I therefore appeal to all delegations to do their utmost in order to enable the Conference to decide on the appointment of the special coordinator on landmines before the recess, that is at the last plenary meeting of the second part of the session on Thursday, 26 June 1997.

(continued in French)

I give the floor to the representative of the United States of America.

Ms. CRITTENBERGER (United States of America): I wanted to express the regret of my delegation that it appears that we are not in a position to take a decision today on the proposal contained in document CD/1463, and I respect your conclusion, Madam, that we indeed are not in that position. I would express the hope that, in light of the fact that we were all notified last Friday that there would be a plenary today, instructions would be received expeditiously, and that we would be in a position to take a positive decision on Thursday.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of the United States of America.

I would like to inform you that I held some bilateral consultations yesterday and I intend to continue with informal consultations open to all delegations after Thursday's plenary meeting, in order to consider all the existing proposals on the programme of work of the Conference. I would like to study with delegations the best way of approaching the complex question of the programme of work, since several approaches exist. What form of consultations would be the most effective? Should we begin with the oldest proposals or with the most recent ones? Should we discuss the agenda as a whole or specific items separately? There are many questions and I hope that you will help me to find the right answers.

I see that the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has asked for the floor. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. ORFI (Syrian Arab Republic) (translated from Arabic): Allow me first of all, Madam President, to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of our Conference. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank H.E. the Ambassador of Senegal, your predecessor, for all her efforts to enable our Conference to reach a successful conclusion of the second part of this year's session. Madam President, my delegation requests you to hold informal consultations at the end of today's plenary meeting concerning the proposal made by the Group of 21 on the programme of work contained in document CD/1462.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic for his statement. Would any other delegations like to take the floor at this stage?

I wish to announce that I will hold informal open-ended consultations immediately after the end of this plenary session.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will take place on Thursday, 26 June at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.